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United Nations

Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

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Sixty-first Session
Supplement No. 35 (A/61/35)

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Letter of transmittal

4 October 2006

Mr. Secretary-General,

I have the honour to enclose herewith the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for submission to the General Assembly in accordance with paragraph 7 of its resolution 60/36 of 1 December 2005.

The report covers the period from 6 October 2005 to 4 October 2006.

Accept, Sir, the assurances of my highest consideration.

(*Signed*) Paul **Badji**
Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the
Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

His Excellency
Mr. Kofi Annan
Secretary-General of the United Nations
New York

Chapter I
Introduction

1. The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People was established by the General Assembly by resolution 3376 (XXX) of 10 November 1975, with the task of recommending a programme designed to enable the Palestinian people to exercise its inalienable rights, as recognized by the Assembly in resolution 3236 (XXIX) of 22 November 1974.

2. The recommendations made by the Committee in its first report to the General Assembly[1] were endorsed by the Assembly as a basis for the solution of the question of Palestine. In its subsequent reports,[2] the Committee has continued to stress that a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine, the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict, must be based on the relevant United Nations resolutions and the following essential principles: the withdrawal of Israel from the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, and from the other occupied Arab territories; respect for the right of all States in the region to live in peace within secure and internationally recognized boundaries; and the recognition and exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, primarily the right to self-determination. The recommendations of the Committee contained in its first report could not be implemented, and the Assembly each year renewed the Committee's mandate and requested it to intensify efforts in pursuit of its objectives.

3. Since 1991, the Committee has consistently supported the peace process. It welcomed the 1991 Madrid Peace Conference that launched the Middle East peace process based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). It also welcomed the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements (A/48/486-S/26560, annex) and subsequent implementation agreements. The Committee has strongly supported the vision of two States, Israel and Palestine, living side by side within secure and recognized borders on the basis of the 1949 armistice lines, in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions, including Security Council resolutions 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003). The Committee

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[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Thirty-first Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/31/35).

[2] Ibid., *Thirty-second Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/32/35); ibid., *Thirty-third Session, Supplement No. 35* and corrigendum (A/33/35 and Corr.1); ibid., *Thirty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 35* and corrigendum (A/34/35 and Corr.1); ibid., *Thirty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/35/35); ibid., *Thirty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/36/35); ibid., *Thirty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 35* and corrigendum (A/37/35 and Corr.1); ibid., *Thirty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/38/35); ibid., *Thirty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/39/35); ibid., *Fortieth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/40/35); ibid., *Forty-first Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/41/35); ibid., *Forty-second Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/42/35); ibid., *Forty-third Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/43/35); ibid., *Forty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/44/35); ibid., *Forty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/45/35); ibid., *Forty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/46/35); ibid., *Forty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/47/35); ibid., *Forty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/48/35); ibid., *Forty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/49/35); ibid., *Fiftieth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/50/35); ibid., *Fifty-first Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/51/35); ibid., *Fifty-second Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/52/35); ibid., *Fifty-third Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/53/35); ibid., *Fifty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/54/35); ibid., *Fifty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/55/35); ibid., *Fifty-sixth Session, Supplement No. 35* and corrigendum (A/56/35 and Corr.1); ibid., *Fifty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/57/35); ibid., *Fifty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/58/35); ibid., *Fifty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/59/35); and ibid., *Sixtieth Session, Supplement No. 35* (A/60/35).

welcomed and supported the Quartet's road map and called on the parties to implement it. In keeping with its mandate, the Committee continued to work towards enabling the Palestinian people to realize its inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination and to its own independent State, on all Palestinian territory occupied in 1967, including East Jerusalem. The Committee also promotes support and assistance by the international community to the Palestinian people.

4. The reporting period began with a cautious hope that the removal in September 2005 of Israeli settlements from the Gaza Strip and parts of the northern West Bank and the withdrawal of the Israeli army from the Gaza Strip would create the much-needed momentum for the resumption of the political dialogue between the parties. There was no progress in the political area either immediately after the pull-out or in the course of the months that followed, however. While the overall situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, remained serious, the situation in Gaza has deteriorated significantly since June 2006.

5. In the course of the year, the Israeli army has continued to conduct its operations in Palestinian population centres, resorting to extrajudicial assassinations, house demolitions and arrests. Palestinian response included suicide attacks in Israel and regular rocket fire by Palestinian armed groups. During the year, chances for a return to the political process remained elusive.

6. The holding of the elections to the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) on 25 January 2006 became a pivotal point in Palestinian political life. The electoral victory of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) confronted the Palestinian political system, the region and the wider international community with new challenges. In the period following the elections, the newly appointed Palestinian Cabinet and the Presidency have not been able to reach an agreement on a common political programme. While President Mahmoud Abbas fully embraced the platform of peace, the Cabinet remained reluctant to recognize Israel and accept all the previously signed bilateral agreements. This situation has persisted throughout the reviewed period, stymieing progress in the political area and negatively affecting efforts to address the rapidly deteriorating Palestinian humanitarian crisis. On 27 June, the major Palestinian factions reached an agreement to bolster national unity on the basis of the "Prisoners' Document"; however, Israeli military action delayed its taking effect.

7. While most Governments have treated the election results as a Palestinian domestic matter, some were not in a position to recognize and cooperate with the Hamas-led Cabinet. This has considerably undercut the prospects of delivering various forms of assistance to the Palestinian people. The decision by major international donors to cease direct assistance programmes has further exacerbated the humanitarian situation.

8. Israel responded to the electoral results by stepping up efforts at undermining the Palestinian Authority and by consolidating control over East Jerusalem, strategic parts of the West Bank and access to the Gaza Strip. The situation escalated dramatically at the end of June 2006 with major Israeli military incursions in the Gaza Strip following the capture of an Israeli soldier by Palestinian armed groups. Overshadowed by the hostilities in Lebanon that started in early July, Israeli military incursions, air strikes and artillery shelling, arbitrary arrests of Palestinian Authority and PLC officials, demolition of houses and crucial infrastructure continued unabated for months. The continued closure by Israel, the occupying Power, of the

crossing points to the Gaza Strip and in the West Bank constituted collective punishment of an entire innocent civilian population.

9. During the year, the Committee remained deeply concerned about the continuing expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the acceleration in the completion of the wall built in the Occupied Palestinian Territory in contravention of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. The Committee cautioned that the Israeli plan to unilaterally draw its own permanent borders, incorporating large parts of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, posed a grave threat to the prospects of a peaceful, negotiated solution of the question of Palestine. It precludes any possibility of improving the economic and humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and made a two-State solution virtually impossible. The Committee reminded Israel, the occupying Power, that its settlement activities, the annexation of East Jerusalem, any actions to strengthen its hold on the city and the construction of the wall on occupied land were contrary to international law. The Secretary-General was encouraged to expedite the establishment of a register of damage caused to all natural or legal persons concerned by the construction of the wall. The Committee called upon all Governments to fulfil their obligations under international law, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention, and to take the necessary steps to ensure that Israel complied with its international obligations.

10. The Committee continued to support the efforts by the Quartet to unblock the stalemate in the political process and resume meaningful negotiations between the parties. It noted that, in the course of the year, the Quartet has met at both the principals and envoys level to address the situation on the ground, restore a credible political process and encourage the parties to move forward towards the implementation of the objectives of the road map. The Quartet's meeting at the principals level in New York on 20 September and a high-level meeting of the Security Council the next day, convened at the initiative of the Council of the League of Arab States, were held with a view to advancing the peace process.

11. The Committee noted the serious efforts by the Palestinian Authority Presidency and the Palestinian leadership to end violence, strengthen the national unity of the Palestinian people and create conditions conducive to reviving the political process and to achieving a solution of the question of Palestine exclusively through peaceful means. It welcomed the signing in June of the National Conciliation Document by the major Palestinian political organizations, and the designation of the Palestinian President as the person in charge of negotiations with Israel, as well as the effort of President Abbas to form a Government of national unity. The Committee called upon the international community to extend all possible cooperation to the Palestinian leadership in its quest for the realization of the inalienable rights of its people.

Chapter II
Mandate of the Committee

12. On 1 December 2005, the General Assembly renewed the mandate of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (see resolution 60/36), requested the Secretary-General to continue to provide the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat with the necessary resources to carry out its programme of work (see resolution 60/37), and requested the continuation of the special information programme on the question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat (see resolution 60/38). On the same date, the Assembly adopted resolution 60/39 entitled "Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine".

Chapter III
Organization of work

A. Membership and officers

13. The Committee is composed of the following Member States: Afghanistan, Belarus, Cuba, Cyprus, Guinea, Guyana, India, Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Madagascar, Malaysia, Mali, Malta, Namibia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tunisia, Turkey and Ukraine.

14. In a letter dated 5 August 2005, the Permanent Representative of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to the United Nations requested that the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela be admitted as an observer to the Committee. At its 289th meeting, held on 10 November 2005, the Committee approved that request and welcomed the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela to take part, as an observer, in the work of the Committee. In a letter, the Chairman informed the President of the General Assembly of the request of the Government of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. The letter from the Chairman and its annex were circulated as a document of the General Assembly (A/60/567).

15. At its 292nd meeting, on 10 February 2005, the Committee re-elected Paul Badji (Senegal) as Chairman, elected Rodrigo Malmierca Diaz (Cuba) as Vice-Chairman, and re-elected Ravan A. G. Farhadi (Afghanistan) as Vice-Chairman and Victor Camilleri (Malta) as Rapporteur.

16. At the same meeting, the Committee adopted its programme of work for 2006.[3]

B. Participation in the work of the Committee

17. As in previous years, the Committee reconfirmed that all United Nations Member States and observers wishing to participate in the work of the Committee as observers were welcome to do so. In accordance with established practice, Palestine participated in the work of the Committee as an observer, attended all of its meetings and made observations and proposals for consideration by the Committee and its Bureau.

18. In 2006, the Committee again welcomed as observers all States and organizations that had participated in its work in the preceding year.[4]

[3] A/AC.183/2006/CRP.1.

[4] The observers at the Committee meetings were as follows: Algeria, Bangladesh, Bulgaria, China, Ecuador, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Mauritania, Morocco, Nicaragua, Niger, Qatar, Sri Lanka, Syrian Arab Republic, United Arab Emirates, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Viet Nam, Yemen, African Union, League of Arab States, Organization of the Islamic Conference and Palestine.

Chapter IV

Review of the situation relating to the question of Palestine

19. Pursuant to its mandate, the Committee continued to monitor the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, as well as relevant political developments. The Palestinian people exercised their right to vote in the PLC elections held on 25 January 2006 throughout the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. Overall, 77 per cent of registered voters cast their votes for a new legislature. Approximately 20,000 national and 1,000 international observers, including missions from the European Union, the National Democratic Institute, the Carter Centre and Canada observed the conduct of the election. The observers concluded that the campaign took place in a relatively calm atmosphere, with an absence of provocative rhetoric, although candidates, campaign and election workers were at times unable to move satisfactorily through Israeli checkpoints during the campaign period. Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and the Palestinian people were congratulated by the Secretary-General, the Quartet and other officials within the international community for an election process that was free, fair and secure, and which marked an important milestone in the building of Palestinian democratic institutions. The Central Elections Commission announced the official results with Hamas winning a majority, consisting of 74 seats. Fatah won 45 seats, with the remaining 13 seats going to smaller parties and independents.

20. On 29 March, President Abbas swore in the new Palestinian Government which included Hamas members and independents, with Mr. Ismail Haniyeh as Prime Minister. In a letter to Mr. Haniyeh, President Abbas asked that the new Government programme be aligned with that of the Palestinian Presidency. The Quartet called on the new Government to commit to the principles of non-violence, recognition of Israel's right to exist and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations, including the road map. Since the illness of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, Mr. Ehud Olmert on 4 January took over the reins of government as Acting Prime Minister, until his election on 28 March. On 19 February, Acting Prime Minister Olmert had announced that Israel would not hold contacts with a Palestinian Government which included Hamas, not transfer some US$ 55 million a month in taxes and tariffs to it and ban the transfer of equipment to its security services. On 10 April, donors decided to freeze direct aid to the Palestinian Authority until it complied with the three principles outlined by the Quartet. In the run-up to and after the elections, Prime Minister Olmert declared his intention to set unilaterally Israel's borders in the West Bank, that would include major settlement blocks, as well as the Jordan River as a security border. In response, the Quartet called upon both parties to avoid unilateral measures which would prejudice final status issues.

21. Efforts were undertaken to find consensus among various Palestinian parties. Led by President Abbas and with the participation of Prime Minister Haniyeh, a Palestinian national dialogue conference took plac on 25 and 26 May. Representatives of political parties, civil society, the private sector, the Palestinian Authority and the Palestine Liberation Organization participated. A final statement concluded that a Prisoners' Document (see para. 31 below) should serve as a basis for the continuation of the national dialogue. On 27 June, a National Conciliation Document was agreed upon. As of the beginning of October, efforts by President

Abbas to form a national unity Government that would reflect the principles put forward by the Quartet, remained inconclusive.

22. Internal Palestinian difficulties, the withholding of hundreds of millions of dollars of Palestinian tax money by Israel, coupled with its continuing military operation in the Occupied Territory, led to a serious political and financial crisis and total paralysis of efforts to restart the dialogue between the parties.

23. During the period under review, the Committee closely monitored the situation on the ground and was greatly alarmed by the intense escalation of violence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Casualties continued to increase, mostly among Palestinians, as a result of the disproportionate use of force by the occupying Power, but also among Israeli civilians in Israel as a result of suicide bombings. During the month of June, Israel stepped up its policy of targeted killings of militants and shelling of the Gaza Strip. On 9 June, an explosion on a beach in the Gaza Strip killed seven civilians, all members of the same family. The Secretary-General called for a full investigation, while Human Rights Watch concluded that Israeli artillery fire was to blame. The Committee has repeatedly condemned the policy and practice of extrajudicial killings as being inadmissible under international law. At the same time, it has strongly condemned all attacks against Israeli civilians in Israel, which could not be justified and undermined any prospect of reconciliation between the parties. Suicide bombings occurred at the market of Hadera in Israel on 26 October 2005, in Netanya on 5 December, outside the settlement of "Kedumim" in the northern West Bank on 30 March and in central Tel Aviv on 17 April 2006, altogether killing at least 21 Israelis and 3 foreigners.

24. In late June and July 2006, the security situation worsened further, making July the deadliest month in the Gaza Strip in nearly two years. On 25 June, an armed Palestinian group attacked an army post near Karam Abu Slim (Kerem Shalom) crossing, killing two Israeli soldiers and capturing one. President Abbas called for the immediate release of the Israeli soldier while calling on the international community and the Quartet to prevent Israel from exploiting the situation to invade the Gaza Strip. On 27 and 28 June, the Israeli army expanded its military operation, code-named "Operation Summer Rains", attacking infrastructure in the Gaza Strip, including bombing the Gaza power station, cutting electricity to some 40 per cent of the Gaza Strip, leaving thousands of the Gaza residents without water. Three bridges were also destroyed, dividing the Gaza Strip into isolated units. The Secretary-General called upon Israel to show restraint and to avoid actions that damaged civilian infrastructure and aggravated the hardship of the Palestinian people. On 6 July, Israeli tanks pushed up to 6 kilometres into the northern Gaza Strip, taking position in three former settlements in an operation code-named "Oaks of Bashan". At least 12 Palestinians and 1 Israeli soldier were killed in the fighting. On 8 July, the Secretary-General called on Israel to restore and maintain the uninterrupted supply of fuel to Gaza and to ensure the passage of food and essential supplies through the Karni crossing. Israeli aircraft bombed the office of Prime Minister Haniyeh on 1 July and the Foreign Ministry building on 13 July. Because of the war in Lebanon, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) along with United Nations humanitarian agencies working

in the Occupied Palestinian Territory,[5] on 3 August, expressed concern that with international attention focusing on Lebanon, the tragedy in Gaza that had started in June was being forgotten. The Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs reported in August to the Security Council that since Israel's disengagement from the Gaza Strip in September 2005 to August 2006, 450 Palestinians had been killed. Over 2,500 have been wounded. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reported 202 Palestinian deaths, including 44 children, since the beginning of the Israeli offensive in Gaza on 28 June. It was estimated that since the start of the second intifada in 2000, close to 4,400 Palestinians have been killed and some 31,000 wounded. As of July 2006, the number of deaths of children under 18 exceeded 850.

25. To improve the freedom of movement and economic activity of Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip, an Agreement on Movement and Access between Israel and the Palestinian Authority was reached on 15 November 2005. It provided for the reopening of the Rafah border crossing with Egypt and other crossing points. The Rafah terminal was transferred to the Palestinian Authority with oversight by European Union monitors. The Rafah and Al-Muntar (Karni) crossings have been only partially operational at rates far lower than foreseen by the Agreement, however. During 2006, less than 10 per cent of the Gaza Strip's minimum daily export targets have been achieved. The Rafah terminal has remained closed for all but two days for most of the months of July and August, preventing people from leaving or entering the Gaza Strip. There has been no progress on the other aspects of the Agreement, such as the Gaza-West Bank link and progress on the airport and seaport. Basic food commodities were severely depleted, bakeries closed and food rationing was introduced. The closure also seriously affected the export of produce from the Gaza Strip. The Al-Muntar (Karni) closures have cost Palestinians up to $500,000 a day, according to United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs estimates. The combination of checkpoints, physical obstacles and a permit system has cut the West Bank into three distinct areas in addition to East Jerusalem. In the Jordan Valley, Israel has placed a series of checkpoints and roadblocks between the Valley and the rest of the West Bank, separating Palestinians from their land, their families and from their jobs. Physical obstacles include the separation wall, checkpoints, partial checkpoints, roadblocks, road gates, earth mounds, earth walls, trenches and fences. The number of physical obstacles increased from 376 in August 2005 to 547 in August 2006.

26. On 9 March 2006, Acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert made public a "convergence plan", in accordance with which Israel would withdraw from parts of the West Bank, and annex "Gush Etzion", the "Jerusalem Envelope", "Ma'ale Adumim", the "Ariel" region and the Jordan River as a "security border". He pledged to build up the "E1" area (area between "Ma'ale Adumim" and Jerusalem). In its statement of 9 May the Quartet rejected any unilateral steps on final status issues by either party. In August 2006, Prime Minister Olmert stated that owing to the war in Lebanon and the significant damage caused to northern Israel, his plan was no longer at the top of his Government's agenda.

[5] Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, World Food Programme, World Health Organization, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, United Nations Children's Fund, United Nations Population Fund and United Nations Development Fund for Women.

27. An issue of great concern to the Committee was the continued construction of the separation wall in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, in contravention of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice rendered on 9 July 2004, which reaffirmed the illegality of the wall. On 30 April 2006, the Israeli Cabinet revised the route, which would further consolidate Israeli control over vital parts of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. The revised route would incorporate over 370,000 settlers, or nearly 87 per cent of the settler population. The wall in the Jerusalem area annexed 228.2 sq km of the West Bank, severing East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank and isolating over 230,000 Palestinian Jerusalemites from the rest of the West Bank. It would further separate over 2 million Palestinians living on the eastern side of the wall from East Jerusalem. The wall would sever East Jerusalem from Bethlehem and Ramallah, communities that have been socially, culturally and economically interdependent. Bethlehem would be completely cut off from Jerusalem, while the "Etzion" block settlements would expand onto more Palestinian land. On 21 March, the Israel Defense Forces issued a military order to seize 81.6 dunums of Palestinian land in Beituniya in the West Bank for construction of the wall. In May, Israeli Justice Minister Haim Ramon committed to finishing construction on 95 per cent of the wall by the end of 2006. Forty-two per cent (336 km) of the planned 790 km structure has been completed. Some 102 km were in various stages of construction, and would be completed at year's end. Sixty-seven kilometres were still at the paperwork level, and the building of a 285-kilometre-long section awaited Israeli court approval. The Committee noted the delay in establishing the register of damages to compensate those who had suffered any material damage as a result of the wall's construction, and urged the Secretary-General to intensify his efforts in that direction.

28. During the year, the Committee also noted the relentless settlement expansion. Territorial contiguity of East Jerusalem settlements was being enhanced. In November 2005, the Israel Land Administration published tenders for 350 housing units in "Ma'ale Adumim", bringing the total tenders for the settlement in 2005 to 665 units. In February 2006, the Israel Land Administration was working on a plan to expand "Pisgat Ze'ev", which had 40,000 residents. It proposed 1,100 new housing units in a development of 18 buildings of five to nine storeys. In March, new housing construction continued in "Karmei Tzur", "Karmel", "Kiryat Arba", "Pnei Hever" and "Susiya". Land levelling continued for a new security fence around "Adora" and "Pnei Hever". Settlers evacuated from the Gaza Strip were settling in the West Bank settlements of "Eshkolot", south of Hebron, "Ariel", and in the Jordan Valley settlement of "Maskiyot". The Jordan Valley is home to some 47,000 Palestinians, along with 8,300 settlers living in 31 settlements. Israel's de facto annexation of this area accounted for an additional 28.5 per cent of the West Bank. On 14 March, the Israeli authorities confirmed the list of 2,000 Palestinians banned from returning to the Jordan Valley. Thousands of dunums of land there had been transferred to settlements and army bases. In April, the Israel Defense Forces requisitioned 25 dunums belonging to the Palestinian towns of Beit Ummar and Halhul to create a buffer zone around "Karmei Tzur". On 4 May, Prime Minister Olmert announced a plan to build thousands of new dwellings in settlements to house evacuees from isolated settlements. Defence Minister Amir Peretz has approved expanding the territorial jurisdiction of four settlements — "Givat Ze'ev", "Oranit", "Maskiyot", and "Beitar Ilit". In spring 2006, construction began for 3,500 new units in "Nof Adumim", part of the "Adumim" settlement block. Construction of the Israeli police station in the E1 area had already been completed. The Israel

Defense Forces authorized plans to expand the municipal boundaries of "Beitar Ilit" by 500 dunums, connecting the settlement and the Green Line. An industrial zone was planned for the area. On 4 September 2006, the Israeli Construction and Housing Ministry solicited tenders for the construction of 690 apartments at "Beitar Ilit" and "Ma'ale Adumim". On 21 September, the Ministry invited bids for construction of 164 housing units for the settlements of "Ariel", "Alfei Menashe" and "Karnei Shomron". The wall and the planned settlement expansion would place some 45.5 per cent of the West Bank under Israeli control.

29. The number of settlers in the West Bank had increased by 3 per cent in the first six months of 2006, from 253,748 to 260,932. Settlers were involved in various violent incidents including attacking Palestinian farmers working their land; attacking Palestinian shepherds and killing their sheep; injuring Palestinian children on their way home in Hebron; uprooting thousands of olive trees and destroying fruit trees in Palestinian farms in Yatta, Kfar Thulth, near Qalqilya; setting fire in the village of Awarta near Nablus; beating Palestinians in their car and damaging their vehicle; throwing stones at cars; blocking roads near Palestinian villages. The settlement of "Beitar Ilit" discharged sewage onto lands belonging to the villages of Wadi Fukin and Nahhalin while settlers from "Ariel" continued to pump sewage water onto Palestinian farmlands belonging to residents of Burkin and Kfer al-Diq. The municipality of Salfit declared an emergency after sewage dumped from "Ariel" had contaminated the sole water well supplying surrounding villages. There have also been attacks by Palestinians against Israeli settlers.

30. The weak financial situation of the Palestinian Authority severely worsened owing to Israeli and donors' decisions to halt transfers of tariffs and direct aid, the contraction of Palestinian economic activity and reduced domestic tax revenues. Unpaid salaries to over 150,000 civil servants, 70,000 of whom were members of the security services, contributed to the deterioration of the security environment as frustrated civil servants vented their anger by protest demonstrations, strikes and taking over Government buildings and confrontations. Nearly 1 million Palestinians relied on Palestinian Authority wage earners whose salaries accounted for about 25 per cent of the gross domestic product. Responding to an urgent appeal of President Abbas, the European Commission in early July 2006 took action through setting up a temporary international mechanism. Its first steps were to provide fuel for hospitals in the Gaza Strip to enable the continued provision of essential health services. The Committee commended the efforts by many Governments to provide immediate financial relief to abate the fiscal crisis of the Palestinian Authority and expressed appreciation to the Arab League and international and regional financial institutions for their continued and augmented commitment. The Committee highly valued the efforts by James Wolfensohn as the Quartet's Special Envoy for Gaza Disengagement in implementing his mandate, as well as his role in the conclusion of the Agreement on Movement and Access.

31. The issue of the continued incarceration of a large number of Palestinian prisoners and detainees in Israeli prisons and detention facilities remained an issue of serious concern for the Committee. In September 2006, the Palestinian Authority Ministry of Detainees and Ex-Detainees Affairs reported that, since 1967, a total of some 700,000 (25 per cent of the population) Palestinians had been taken prisoner in the Occupied Palestinian Territory by Israel. There were 10,100 detainees still held in 30 Israeli prisons and detention facilities. Since September 2000, the beginning of the second intifada, about 4,000 children and 500 women had been arrested or

detained. About 120 women remained in custody. Prisoners and detainees were subjected to practices that undermined their health, tortured and humiliated. Palestinian political detainees in Israeli prisons, including senior Fatah and Hamas members, announced on 10 May an agreement on common principles for national action and dialogue outlined in a Prisoners' Document. The document was regarded as a precursor to a Palestinian national dialogue (see para. 21 above). On 29 June, Israel arrested 64 Palestinian Authority officials, including cabinet ministers and PLC members. On 5 August, PLC speaker Abd al-Aziz Dweik was arrested in Ramallah by Israeli forces. The Secretary-General expressed concern at the detention of the Palestinian officials, including PLC members.

32. The humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory has steadily worsened. Unemployment and poverty rates have increased dramatically. In May 2006, the rate of unemployment had been 34 per cent in the Occupied Palestinian Territory as a whole and 44 per cent in the Gaza Strip. This rate rose to 55 per cent during times of complete closure imposed by Israel. Similarly, the poverty rate was nearly 50 per cent, with the Gaza Strip rate at approximately 70 per cent. In June 2006, the World Food Programme increased the number of people it fed in the Occupied Palestinian Territory by 25 per cent, or from 480,000 to 600,000 non-refugees. Nearly 2 million Palestinians, 51 per cent of the population, were unable to meet their daily food needs without assistance. The plight of women has remained extremely difficult owing to the worsening security and economic situation. In the past six years, hundreds of women have been killed and injured on their way to and from work and as a result of being denied access to medical services. Half of all families living in Palestine refugee camps were headed by women. Female-headed households have been disproportionately affected by the rise in poverty that accompanied the violence and closures.

33. The Palestinian people have continued to suffer from low reserves and the quality of the drinking water available to them, a crisis caused by both the exhaustion of the Palestinian aquifer reservoirs by Israel and the over-drainage of thousands of illegal wells spread throughout the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. In the West Bank, Israel controlled 83 per cent of the Palestinian water. It also infringed on the Palestinian right to water in the Jordan Valley. The water crisis was further exacerbated by the security situation, which hindered projects aimed at improving the quality of water and providing alternatives to the available sources of water. More than 220 communities in the West Bank, around 320,000 people, were unconnected to water mains. Hundreds were forced to purchase water from expensive and unsanitary tankers. Farmers had to use expensive water to irrigate vegetable farms. Medical sources said diarrhoea, gastroenteritis, fever, kidney failure, infection and dermatological problems affected most Palestinian children and persisted to adulthood because of poor water supplies.

34. UNRWA officials expressed alarm that the general living conditions of the Palestine refugees in the Gaza Strip had become "deplorable and getting worse". In early June, authorities had not been able to pay suppliers, hospital staff and teachers, for three months, disrupting essential services, including medical care. Increasing restrictions imposed by Israel on Palestinian movement further stifled the economy. The Agency was caring for over 1.1 million people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory under its emergency programme, providing cash, food and temporary employment. In late July 2006, continued Israeli shelling drove over 1,500 Palestinians from their homes in the Beit Hanoun area to the Jabalya camp. Four

UNRWA schools at the camp were serving as makeshift shelters for those who had to flee their homes. While focused on the plight of Palestine refugees within its mandate, UNRWA also extended assistance to a number of non-refugee civilians affected by the war in Lebanon during July and August.

35. The Committee expressed appreciation for the work of the Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP/PAPP). With funding from Japan, UNDP played a central role in supporting the Palestinian legislative election through establishing a Liaison and Support Unit that served as a resource centre for the over 1,000 international observers monitoring the elections. To combat poverty and rehabilitate agricultural land in the worst hit areas, UNDP/PAPP signed an agreement with the Islamic Development Bank, with funding by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). The project, the first of its kind with OPEC, focused on the agricultural sector of the Tulkarm area in the West Bank, which had suffered from restricted mobility and damage to agricultural land and infrastructure. In December 2005, UNDP/PAPP was entrusted by the Palestinian Authority, Israel and the Office of the Special Envoy of the Quartet to carry out a task of clearing and recycling the rubble left behind as a result of the destruction of the settlements in the Gaza Strip. With over 1.2 million tons of rubble to be cleared, the project would cost $24.7 million, which was being funded by Israel. Progress on this project was hampered by the heavy shelling of the former settlement areas. With funding from Japan and Norway, UNDP was taking a lead in assessing the damage to the infrastructure and assisting in alleviating the humanitarian crisis through employment generation schemes, removal of solid waste, and supplying essential fuel and equipment.

36. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, established in the Occupied Palestinian Territory in 2000, was a response to the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Its aim was to improve the humanitarian situation by enhancing coordination between agencies to ensure effective distribution of humanitarian assistance. It provides analytical reports on crucial issues to inform policymakers and help aid organizations in their operational decisions. It acts as guardian for the Consolidated Appeal Process. In September, donor nations pledged an additional $116 million, although the humanitarian appeal remained 42 per cent underfunded.

Chapter V

Action taken by the Committee

A. Action taken in accordance with General Assembly resolution 60/36

37. In pursuance of its mandate, the Committee continued to mobilize the international community in support of the Palestinian people, in cooperation with United Nations bodies, Governments, intergovernmental and civil society organizations and others, as indicated below.

1. Action taken in the Security Council

38. During the period under review, the Security Council has continued to monitor the situation on the ground and the efforts to implement the road map. Throughout the year, the Council held monthly briefings under the agenda item entitled "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question".

39. The Security Council met on 30 March 2006 for the monthly briefing, which was followed by a debate. The Chairman of the Committee, Mr. Paul Badji, took part in the debate and made a statement (see S/PV.5404).

40. The Security Council met on 17 April 2006, at the request of the Permanent Representative of Bahrain in his capacity as Chairman of the Arab Group for the month of April 2006 and on behalf of the States members of the League of Arab States (see S/2006/227), the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of Yemen in his capacity as Chairman of the Organization of the Islamic Conference Group (see S/2006/239), and the Permanent Representative of Malaysia in his capacity as Chairman of the Coordinating Bureau of the Non-Aligned Movement (see S/2006/240). The Chairman of the Committee took part in the debate and made a statement (see S/PV.5411).

41. The Security Council met on 30 June 2006 for the monthly briefing, which was followed by a debate (see S/PV.5481).

42. The Security Council met on 13 July 2006, at the requests of the Permanent Representative of Algeria, in his capacity as Chairman of the Arab Group for the month of June 2006, and on behalf of the States members of the League of Arab States (see S/2006/458), and the Permanent Representative of Qatar (see S/2006/462). The Council voted on a draft resolution submitted by Qatar (see S/2006/508). The result of the vote was 10 votes in favour, 1 against and 4 abstaining. The draft resolution was not adopted owing to the negative vote of a permanent member of the Council (see S/PV.5488).

43. The Security Council met on 21 July 2006 for a briefing from the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General and the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, which was followed by a debate. The Chairman of the Committee took part in the debate and made a statement (see S/PV.5493).

44. The Security Council met on 22 August 2006 for the monthly briefing, which was followed by a debate (see S/PV.5515).

45. The Security Council met on 21 September 2006, at the request of the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States (see S/2006/700). A debate, at the ministerial level, was held (see S/PV.5530).

2. Statements by the Committee

46. On 7 February 2006, the Bureau of the Committee issued a statement on the holding of the PLC elections (see GA/PAL/1000).

47. On 27 July 2006, the Bureau of the Committee issued a statement concerning the Israeli military operations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (see GA/PAL/1017).

3. Participation by the Chairman of the Committee in international conferences and meetings

48. During the year, the Chairman of the Committee participated in events in support of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and contributed to their deliberations. The Chairman participated in the International Media Seminar on Peace in the Middle East, held from 8 to 9 June 2006 in Moscow, organized by the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat.

B. Action taken by the Committee and the Division for Palestinian Rights in accordance with General Assembly resolutions 60/36 and 60/37

1. Programme of international meetings and conferences

49. Through its programme of international meetings and conferences, the Committee continued to raise international awareness of the various aspects of the question of Palestine, and international support for the rights of the Palestinian people and the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine.

50. In the period under review, the following international events were held under the auspices of the Committee:

(a) United Nations Latin American and Caribbean Meeting on the Question of Palestine, Caracas, 13 and 14 December 2005;

(b) United Nations Public Forum in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace, Caracas, 15 December 2005;

(c) United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People, Cairo, 26 and 27 April 2006;

(d) United Nations International Meeting in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace, United Nations Office at Vienna, 27 and 28 June 2006;

(e) Consultations with civil society organizations, United Nations Office at Vienna, 29 June 2006;

(f) United Nations International Conference of Civil Society in Support of the Palestinian People, United Nations Office at Geneva, 7 and 8 September 2006.

51. All of the above-mentioned events were attended by representatives of Governments, Palestine, intergovernmental organizations and United Nations system entities, as well as representatives of civil society and the media. The reports of the meetings were issued as publications of the Division for Palestinian Rights and were made available through the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine (UNISPAL) and the Division's website.

52. In Cairo, during the United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People, the Committee delegation was received by Mr. Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Arab Republic of Egypt, who stressed the urgency of supporting peace in the Middle East and welcomed the efforts of the Committee in that regard. At Vienna, in connection with the United Nations International Meeting in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace, the Committee delegation met with Ambassador Ralph Scheide, head of the Near and Middle East Department of the Austrian Foreign Ministry. On the sidelines of the United Nations International Conference of Civil Society in Support of the Palestinian People held in Geneva, the Committee delegation had meetings at the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs of Switzerland in Bern, with the International Committee of the Red Cross and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

2. Cooperation with intergovernmental organizations

53. Throughout the year, the Committee continued its close cooperation with the African Union, the Non-Aligned Movement and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, through the participation of the Chairman in their meetings and through periodic consultations at United Nations Headquarters.

54. The Committee continued its cooperation on the question of Palestine with States members of the European Union. The Bureau held consultations with representatives of the European Union in March 2006 (under the Presidency of Austria) as part of the ongoing effort to build a constructive relationship with European Union members on issues of common concern.

3. Cooperation with civil society

Civil society organizations

55. The Committee continued to work with civil society organizations, academic institutions, think tanks and media representatives, using consultations with civil society representatives, participation in meetings organized by civil society organizations and the accreditation of new organizations. This work was reviewed and further advanced at the United Nations International Conference of Civil Society in Support of the Palestinian People. It provided civil society organizations from all regions of the world with an opportunity to discuss the situation on the ground, promote their current programmes, develop action-oriented proposals in support of the Palestinian people and improve the coordination of their activities. The Committee was appreciative of the work done by many civil society organizations and encouraged them to continue their work towards a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

56. The Committee maintained and developed its liaison with the national, regional and international coordinating mechanisms cooperating with it, in addition to its established liaison with a large number of individual organizations.

Representatives of civil society participated in all meetings organized under the auspices of the Committee, including the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People on 29 November 2005. In the period under review, the Committee also accredited 13 new organizations, including 2 as observers. Consultations between the delegation of the Committee and representatives of organizations accredited to the Committee were held at the United Nations Office at Vienna on 29 June 2006, following the United Nations International Meeting in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace. Participating representatives of non-governmental organizations discussed the humanitarian crisis in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and exchanged views with the Committee delegation on ways to improve their cooperation. The Chairman of the Committee has met throughout the year with representatives of civil society organizations in New York and at the meetings organized under the auspices of the Committee away from Headquarters.

57. The Division for Palestinian Rights maintained the Internet website "NGO Network on the Question of Palestine" as a tool for exchange of information and for cooperation between civil society and the Committee. The website can be found at http://www.un.org/depts/dpa/ngo. At the request of the Committee, the Division also continued to issue its bimonthly newsletter, *NGO Action News*, covering the activities of civil society on the various aspects of the question of Palestine.

Parliaments and inter-parliamentary organizations

58. The Committee continued to develop its liaison with national and regional parliaments and their organizations and invited a number of parliamentarians to speak at its meetings. During the year, the Bureau of the Committee has met with members of the PLC, the Knesset and other national parliaments.

4. Research, monitoring and publications

59. The Division carried out research and monitoring activities and responded to requests for information and briefings on the question of Palestine. Under the guidance of the Committee, which reiterated the relevance of the research, monitoring and publications programme, it also prepared the publications listed below for dissemination, including through UNISPAL:

(a) Monthly bulletin on action taken by United Nations and intergovernmental organizations relevant to the question of Palestine;

(b) Monthly chronology of events relating to the question of Palestine, based on media reports and other sources;

(c) Reports of international meetings and conferences organized under the auspices of the Committee;

(d) Special bulletins and information notes on the observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People;

(e) Periodic reviews of developments related to the Middle East peace process;

(f) Annual compilation of resolutions and decisions of the General Assembly and the Security Council relating to the question of Palestine.

5. United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine

60. The Division for Palestinian Rights, in cooperation with relevant technical and library services of the United Nations Secretariat, continued to administer, maintain, expand and develop UNISPAL, pursuant to successive annual General Assembly mandates. This included the ongoing upgrading of technical components of the system to ensure its uninterrupted presence on the Internet, notably via the UNISPAL "Question of Palestine" portal, also developed and maintained by the Division, which is located on the United Nations home page, under "Peace and Security", and involved the expansion of the documents collection to include relevant new and old documents. In addition, steps continued to be taken to enhance the user-friendliness and usefulness of the system (http://domino.un.org/unispal.nsf) — including by incorporating additional multimedia content.

6. Training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority

61. Two staff members from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Palestinian Authority participated in a training programme conducted by the Division, from September to December 2005, in conjunction with the sixtieth session of the General Assembly. The trainees familiarized themselves with various aspects of the work of the Secretariat and other organs and conducted research on specific topics.

7. International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People

62. The International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People was observed at Headquarters and at the United Nations Offices at Geneva and Vienna on 29 November 2005. On the occasion of the observance at Headquarters, in addition to a special meeting of the Committee and other activities, a performance by the El-Funoun dance troupe entitled "Dancing Tragedies and Dreams" was organized by the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine under the auspices of the Committee. The Committee noted with appreciation that the International Day of Solidarity had also been observed in many cities throughout the world. Details on the observance are contained in the special bulletin issued by the Division.

63. In adopting its programme of work, the Committee decided that a similar observance of the International Day of Solidarity should be organized in 2006.

Chapter VI

Action taken by the Department of Public Information in accordance with General Assembly resolution 60/38

64. The Department of Public Information, pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 59/30 of 1 December 2004 and 60/38, continued to implement its special information programme on the question of Palestine, using various tools at its disposal to disseminate information on this issue to the international community.

65. The Department's television, radio, press, photo and Internet news operations regularly covered the question of Palestine, providing live and archived coverage of open meetings of the General Assembly, the Security Council and other intergovernmental bodies on the issue. They also covered other programmes and activities in which the situation was addressed.

66. During the period under review, the Department issued 148 press releases on the question of Palestine (78 in English and 70 in French). In May 2006, the Department published the revised edition of *Basic Facts about the United Nations* in French and Spanish, which included an extensive section on the Middle East and all aspects of the Palestinian question. A revised edition of the smaller, companion volume, *UN in Brief*, was simultaneously issued in all six official languages.

67. United Nations Radio regularly covered various aspects of the question of Palestine and related issues in the news bulletins and the current affairs magazines in the official and non-official languages. Among the themes and issues covered were: the food crisis in Gaza owing to the Karni crossing closure; the request by UNRWA for $95.5 million to reconstruct Gaza and the West Bank; the World Food Programme warning on the deepening humanitarian crisis in Gaza; and the Secretary-General urging Israel to respect international humanitarian law.

68. The Arabic Language Unit covers all statements by the Security Council, the Secretary-General, the Special Envoy to the Middle East and the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs. It has contracted with two stringers who live in the West Bank and Gaza, and their reports from the region have improved the quality of the unit's outputs.

69. The United Nations website continued to host a page on the question of Palestine under the "Global issues" page, as well as the "Peace and Security" and "Refugees" pages. Links are available to UNISPAL, as well as to the web pages created by the Department of Political Affairs. In addition, the Website Section webcast all meetings of the Security Council and the General Assembly and most press conferences on the question of Palestine held at Headquarters, which were available immediately afterwards as archived webcasts.

70. The *UN News Centre* portal continued to provide extensive coverage on the question of Palestine and a wide array of related developments and issues. The number of visitors to the portal (which is available in all official languages) continued to grow. Notably, the Arabic version has registered over 1 million page views in the last 12 months. On the English- and French-language versions of the portal, related issues were the subject of nearly 400 news stories, which were also distributed worldwide to some 43,000 e-mail subscribers through the United Nations News Service. The period under review also witnessed a considerable increase in the usage of the portal's special "News Focus" page, providing visitors with easy

access to the broad range of United Nations resources on the question of Palestine, including links to key reports, statements, resolutions and other related materials.

71. United Nations Television distributed 12 stories related to the question of Palestine via UNifeed, a daily satellite television news feed reaching hundreds of broadcasters around the world.

72. As part of its special information programme on Palestine, the Department organized a training programme for 10 young Palestinian journalists at Headquarters, in Washington, D.C., and at the United Nations Office at Geneva, from 24 October to 9 December 2005. The programme was aimed at strengthening the participants' capacity as media professionals.

73. In cooperation with the Foreign Ministry of the Russian Federation, the Department organized an International Media Seminar on Peace in the Middle East, in Moscow on 8 and 9 June 2006, in which 72 people participated. Press releases were issued on the proceedings of the two-day seminar. The seminar was covered by the *Jerusalem Post*, *Yediot Ahronot*, *Ha'aretz*, *Al-Ayam* and *Al-Ahram* newspapers, as well as by *ITAR-TASS*, *Interfax*, *WAFA* (Palestinian News Agency) and major Russian television channels.

74. The Dag Hammarskjöld Library digitized documents pertaining to the United Nations Palestine Commission (A/AC.21 series) for the UNISPAL document collection.

75. The network of United Nations information centres, services and offices continued to disseminate information on the question of Palestine and to organize special outreach activities. Press releases, statements, documents and audio-visual material were brought to the attention of target audiences, posted on their websites and made available to visitors of their reference libraries.

76. A major focus of activities was the promotion of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. The Department assisted in the installation of the annual exhibit on the question of Palestine at Headquarters. Special events and activities, including conferences and public forums, were organized by the centres, services and offices individually or jointly with academic institutions, foreign ministries or United Nations Associations. The Secretary-General's message for the Day was widely disseminated in official and non-official languages.

77. In addition, support was provided to the United Nations Latin American and Caribbean Meeting on the Question of Palestine, held in Caracas; the United Nations Seminar on Assistance to the Palestinian People, held in Cairo; the United Nations International Meeting in Support of Palestinian Peace, held in Vienna; and to the Commissioner-General of UNRWA during her visit to Brussels and Washington, D.C.

Chapter VII

Conclusions and recommendations of the Committee

78. The year was marked by a steady deterioration of the security and humanitarian situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. The Committee expressed particular concern at the Israeli incursions into Gaza during the recent months and its destructive effects on the Palestinian people and on their hopes for peace. The Committee calls upon Israel to end its military operations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and to stop any other measures that further undermine Palestinian institutions. It reminds Israel, the occupying Power, that it is bound by the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Times of War, which obliges the parties to protect civilians during hostilities. The Convention's applicability to the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, has been repeatedly confirmed by the General Assembly and the Security Council. Israel must end its incursions into Gaza, cease offensive military operations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, withdraw its forces to their original positions outside Gaza, and release, immediately and unconditionally, all imprisoned cabinet members and parliamentarians, as well as other Palestinian prisoners. The Committee strongly condemns the killing of innocent civilians by either side. It denounces rocket attacks on Israel and calls for a cessation of those activities by Palestinian armed groups. The Committee is strongly opposed to the expansion of settlements in the West Bank and efforts to complete the construction of the wall on Palestinian land. It is particularly alarmed by the intention of the Israeli Government to expand large settlement blocks in the West Bank, which would separate East Jerusalem from the West Bank and the southern West Bank from its northern part. The Committee reiterates its position of principle that the settlements and the wall constructed by Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, are contrary to international humanitarian law and numerous resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly, adopted since 1967, as well as the provisions of the road map. It reminds the Secretary-General of the urgency of establishing the register of damage caused by the construction of the wall.

79. The Committee welcomes the signing of the National Conciliation Document by the major Palestinian political organizations, the decision to form a national unity Government, and the designation of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas as the person in charge of negotiations with Israel. These have been encouraging developments and should be supported by Israel and the international community. At the same time, the international community should focus on practical and meaningful benchmarks to engage all parties to achieve a mutual ceasefire and support major international peace efforts, including the Arab Peace Initiative and the road map. The Committee reiterates that only a negotiated solution can bring about the goal of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine through the establishment of two States, Israel and Palestine, based on the 1967 borders. A settlement should be based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003) in particular, and other relevant resolutions. The Committee hopes that the Security Council, the Quartet and the other actors of the international community will continue to work towards the achievement of this goal.

80. The Committee feels strongly that, through the programme of mandated activities of the Division for Palestinian Rights, it will be able to continue to generate heightened international awareness of the various aspects of the question of Palestine, as well as international support for the rights of the Palestinian people and the peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine. In that connection, the Committee emphasizes the essential contribution of the Division in support of its mandate aimed at enabling the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable rights. In that regard, the Committee notes with satisfaction (a) the level of dialogue, engagement and support of the international community for its programme objectives, for instance, in terms of both participation at the meetings convened and the use of printed and electronic information materials provided by the Division; (b) the number of civil society organizations that have received accreditation to the Committee; and (c) the number of pages viewed on the United Nations website on the question of Palestine. The Committee also considers that the annual training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority has proved its usefulness, and requests that it be continued.

81. The Committee considers that its programme of international meetings and conferences contributes to focusing the attention of Governments, intergovernmental and civil society organizations and the general public on issues crucial for advancing a peaceful settlement of the conflict. The meetings highlight the most pressing concerns, such as the need to end violence, stop settlement activities and improve the living conditions of the Palestinian population. They contribute to raising international awareness of the root cause of the conflict, namely the occupation by Israel of the Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. They also mobilize international support for efforts to resolve the conflict, including through the convening of an international peace conference. It will continue the programme to foster support for the attainment by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights in accordance with international legitimacy. In its meetings programme for 2007, the Committee intends to address such issues as the detrimental effects of unilateral steps by the occupying Power; the responsibility of all Governments to apply international law to all aspects of the question of Palestine, in accordance with the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice; the need to convene the Conference of High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention, in view of the systematic violation by the occupying Power of international humanitarian law; the adverse consequences of the settlement policy and the construction of the wall for the achievement of a two-State solution; the collective international responsibility to protect the Palestinian people; the need to alleviate humanitarian and socio-economic hardships, including the plight of Palestinian women and children; and the role of civil society.

82. The Committee commends civil society organizations for their efforts to uphold international legitimacy with regard to the question of Palestine through advocacy and the mobilization of public opinion and for their initiatives aimed at alleviating the plight of the Palestinian people. It notes the support it receives from the Secretariat in strengthening its cooperation with civil society. The Committee encourages civil society organizations to broaden their base and to focus and harmonize their advocacy efforts at the local, national, regional and international levels with respect to the legal obligations

of Governments, as emphasized in the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. It supports all humanitarian and assistance initiatives geared towards improving the daily lives of the Palestinians. The Committee will continue to involve parliamentarians in its programme of international meetings and conferences.

83. **The Committee requests the Division to continue its substantive and secretariat support; the programme of research, monitoring and publications and other informational activities, such as the further expansion and development of UNISPAL, including the graphic enhancement of the "Question of Palestine" website; the annual training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority; and the annual observance of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.**

84. **The Committee is of the view that the special information programme on the question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information has made an important contribution to informing the media and public opinion of the relevant issues. The Committee requests the programme's continuation, with the necessary flexibility, as warranted by developments relevant to the question of Palestine.**

85. **Wishing to make its contribution to the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine and in view of the many difficulties facing the Palestinian people and besetting the peace process, the Committee calls upon all States to join it in this endeavour and invites the General Assembly again to recognize the importance of its role and to reconfirm its mandate with overwhelming support.**

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